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West of Lincoln



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Chapter 1 by Tukker

Lot of snakes in Nebraska, one of them crawling up my leg. I could feel the serpent inching around my shin and up my calf. I need better boots. Nice leather pair that go up a little higher so as to keep the goddamn snakes out!

I shuffled onto my back slowly as a bead of sweat tickled the end of my nose then fell and salted my lip. The snake stopped moving. I had a hard time deciding if that was a good thing or a bad thing. I mean there are definitely some places I'd rather not get bit. Nebraska is one of them. My man parts is another. I undid the buckle on my trousers and undid the drawstring with a pull. Cautiously I slid my non snake protecting boots off my feet.

Just up the hill Elgin "Hoss" Hockell and "Dirty" Duane Guilick were bedding down by their small fire. If they see me that will improve my chances of dying significantly. Which you'd think would be a stretch given their was a gall darn snake in my britches.

Chapter 2 by Shasta



I had cheated Hoss and Dirty Duane in a game of poker, down in Virginia. They hadn't trusted me since. Always ruining my reputation, pointing at me and saying, "There he be! Man with no word!"

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The locals hated us. Wives swept us off porches, denied us an ice, cold beer. We weren't wanted.

I had been shadowing Hoss and Dirty Duane for a while now. A paid job I would gladly do. Follow the two sweaty hogs up to Montana? My pleasure.

"Goddamit," Hoss said, "Norton we know you be behind us. C'mon join us before you lure a Indian."

"Far worse than that," I called out to him. "Got me a snake crawling up my leg."

"Bah!" Dirty Duane laughed. "Right stupid there. We all know there ain't no snakes here."

"Is too," I called. "I've seen 'em."

"Nah," Dirty Duane said. "Them be no snakes. Them be something else."

"What they be?" I asked.

"Rumor from Mexico, Norton. Snakes are s'posed to monitor a person's heartbeat, oxygen levels," Hoss called out. "Ain't a good sign if a snake be on you. Means one thing."

"What does it mean?" I asked.

"Means the government's watching you. Come and sit. We got beans on the fire, coffee is hot. Let's have us a look at the snake."

Chapter 3 by r e m i



We gathered around our fire, sitting on our packs. Hoss was a big man, over 6 feet tall and 300 pounds. He could give even the cruelest deputy the willies. Hoss didn't like violence. He wanted beer, and dancing, and gambling, but not violence.

His partner, Dirty Duane, was not like Hoss. He was a skinny fellow with a mustache and a rash of stubble he called a beard. He was a good shot, but he was also a too-long nose that protruded from his face like the rack of a coal miner. Dirty Duane loved cheating, he loved shootin' his gun at anything that moved, but he was a good man.

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Dirty Duane used to be a lawman. He used to be one of the most excellent trackers and fairies lawmans to walk the ground. Then, he went corrupt. Heard of an easy way outshooting Indians and robbing the gold miners. So, he did that.

He's wanted now.

They both are.

"Lemme see a snake," Hoss said, reaching over to pour himself some coffee. "I know you ain't got no snake; it's som'thun else. You just wanted a cup o' coffee, I reckon."

Dirty Duane laughed harshly. "Free meal, nice fire. Oh, yeah, Norton, you wanted someone else to start your fire."

"Cup ah coffee be mighty fine," I said, nodding at Hoss. "Reckon it's gonna taste like piss."

"Why you say that?" Hoss asked, eyes narrowing.

"Had some down in San Antonia, best damn coffee I ever had. Ain't nothing going to beat it." I said, accepting the cup. "Now 'bout the snake."

I pulled up my pant leg, revealing the snake that had attached to the fleshy part just behind my knee. It wasn't painful; it was just a nuisance. It was hard to bend my knee because it was gripping it so hard.

"That's a government snake," Hoss said, nodding his head. "You employed by the government, Nort?"

I smiled, sickeningly sweet. "I am, and you two are about to be acquainted with the government of the Intergalactic Wild, Wild West."

The snake slithered off of my leg and onto the ground, enlarging and engorging until it became a basilisk. A robotic basilisk that wanted to know everything about a genuine Wild, Wild West

cowboy.

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